

IN MEMORIAM.

Mrs. J. F. Stearns.

"Simply to Thy cross I cling."

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1869

57-17
DIED—In Newark, N. J., on Saturday afternoon, Jan. 2d, 1869, ANNA S. PRENTISS, wife of Rev. Jonathan F. Stearns, D. D., Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.

THE FUNERAL.

57-17
S. Craven
The great interest shown in the funeral services of Mrs. STEARNS, and the immense throng which gathered in the First Church, yesterday afternoon, to pay their last tribute of respect to the memory of one who, by her warm and loving heart, had endeared herself to all classes of this community, would seem to warrant a more extended notice of the exercises than we were able to give yesterday. The immediate friends of the family met at the house, where prayer was offered by the Rev. Dr. Brinsmade. As the procession entered the church and the tolling of the bells ceased, the choir began to chant, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." The body was borne by the Session of the church she so much loved, and in whose welfare and piety she took so deep an interest. With a sympathetic tenderness, the pulpit had been entirely enveloped in a black pall, gracefully festooned around the desk, and the pastor's pew was draped in mourning. On the coffin the Sunday-school had placed, as a testimonial of their love, a beautiful anchor and cross and crown of flowers, symbolical of her hope, her faith and her victory over death. Besides these there was a wreath from one of the classes, which had a peculiar interest and sympathy, and a circle containing a cross from a near and dear friend.

Rev. Dr. Few Smith opened the services with a short invocation, and was followed by Rev. Dr. Craven, who read a selection of most appropriate and comforting passages from the Holy Scriptures, which so abound in consolation to the mourner, and from which alone through God's blessing comes the strength to bear the crushing sorrows of life.

The first two verses of the hymn, "Rock of Ages," closing with those words of faith and love which were the dying

comfort and stay of the departed, "Simply to Thy cross I cling," were sung by the choir; after which Rev. Dr. Poor delivered a most touching address, beautiful in expression and full of tender feeling. He paid a glowing tribute to the excellencies of Mrs. STEARNS, as a wife and mother in her own family, as a woman of society in her intercourse with the world, and as throwing over all the spotless robe of a deep and consistent piety. As he repeated her dying messages to the church, to the Maternal Society and to her friends, and her exclamations of faith and perfect trust in the goodness of her Saviour, and entire submission to His will, the whole house was hushed to a profound silence. He said he did not come to eulogize her; her own request forbade it. Had it not, he would have craved the privilege of twining a wreath, culled from her many virtues, and laying it with loving hand on her coffin as a weak expression of his grief and affection.

Rev. Dr. Adams, of New York, followed in a few feeling and comforting remarks, delivered in his own peculiarly-felicitous style.

Prayer was offered by Rev. Dr. Wilson, in which he invoked Divine strength upon the stricken ones, who mourned the loss of their best and wisest and dearest earthly comforter, and commended them to Him who had so gently dealt with them even when He chastised.

The services closed with an exquisite rendering of "Unveil thy bosom, faithful tomb," and the benediction by Rev. Pres. Maclean, of Princeton.

Opportunity was then given to take leave of the remains, of which large numbers of loving friends availed themselves.

At the grave, Rev. Dr. Few Smith repeated a few passages of Scripture and pronounced the final benediction as the body was lowered into the vault behind the old church, where it is to be temporarily deposited.—*Newark Daily Journal*, Jan. 7th.

ADDRESS.

BY REV. D. W. POOR, D. D.

"THE LORD's voice crieth unto this city," my friends, to-day. By a sorely and widely-afflictive bereavement has He interposed to arrest the appointed order of service,* and given us a special theme to consider, and a special duty to discharge. From one of your oldest and long-honored Pastors has He taken lover and friend; and we are here at His call to convey the once-beautiful, but now lifeless form to its resting-place among those that sleep in JESUS. And what opposite emotions commingle on such an occasion! How deep calls unto deep, as the unmeasured heights of heaven look down into the dark abysses of earth into which we seem cast down, and strive to lift us up by their divine attraction!

There is here the bitterness of an inexpressible grief at the loss incurred; yet there is, also, a sweetness and a blessedness in the comforts attending it that make the mourner rich in a possession which the world might well covet. Pain—prolonged, excruciating—

* The funeral occurred during the week of prayer at the beginning of the year, and took the place of one of the appointed services.

ating, almost unendurable pain—has been here, penetrating with its sharp agony every loving heart that sought to relieve it; yet amid it all, have shown out the graces and virtues of a character which but for that trial would never have been fully known or appreciated. Hard, very hard was it for husband and children, and brother and sisters, and friends to say, "Farewell;" but oh, how cheering, as the veil was rent which let the spirit through into the realms beyond, to catch the assurance, "I go to be with Jesus. Meet me there at His feet." O, my friends, little as we imagine it, we live in a strange and wondrous world—the seen and the temporal parting us so thinly from the unseen and the eternal.

Did we but know it, these Christian environments which enclose us, bring our habitation within the holy place of God's sanctuary. Here on earth we have the light of the candlestick—even the illumination of God's word. Here, we enjoy the bread of His unseen presence. Here, we offer the incense of our prayers. But just the other side of the veil of this flesh—this flesh which is also Christ's flesh, consecrated by Him—"for we are partakers of His body, of His flesh and His bones"—just the other side of this light fleshly veil, I say, is the Holy of holies, bright with the glory of our Redeemer, God, and populous with the saints whom He has gathered unto Himself—and this beloved sister and friend of ours has just passed in thither, through the new and living way which Christ has opened for her and for us. How near to us still, then; yet how far removed. Within the enclosures of the same great tabernacle, yet divided from us by a partition which no earthly

vision can pierce. Belonging to the same great family, yet under another form of existence—released from sin, and pain, and sorrow, and perceptibly nearer to Jesus—with Him in Paradise, while we a little longer wait, following on.

And now, my friends, through her leave-taking, so sad for us, so joyful for her, God draws us this day in solemn assembly near to this veil, and bids us think of what is beyond, and listen to the voices which come from thence. He would have us realize the holiness of the place where we dwell, by showing us what it borders upon, and what we are hastening to. There is nothing, methinks, so fitted to impress us with the solemnity of our present state, and to teach us how we ought to live, as to be brought right up to the confines of the other world under the guidance of some friend who has been called hence, and to observe the faith, the hope, the triumph of the soul as it comes under the powers of the unseen, and testifies to the truth of what it has believed in here. Here is the profit of these occasions; and most fitly has God interposed a lesson of this sort for us in the midst of these observances, which were designed to consecrate the coming year. Hardly could He have touched us so sensitively, and stirred our emotions so deeply, by any other bereavement. It is the wife of the Pastor of this, the First church in this city, that now lies low—one of those in our ministerial circle who has been the longest here, and one who was the most extensively known—one whose character shone bright among the brightest, and won to her all hearts by the magic of her varied graces and accomplishments—one who united

the virtues of a true wife and mother with the charms of a woman of society, and threw over them all the robe of a sincere and unaffected piety, so as to fill her place in the home, in the social circle and in the church with accordant completeness—one who had a word of kindness and a benevolent smile for old and young, rich and poor, the cultivated and the uncultivated, binding them all alike to herself and to her husband, and thus strengthening every interest with which she was concerned. Take her for all in all, she was one of the rarest women whom it was my privilege to know. Were this the place I would gladly twine a wreath out of her many and varied excellencies, as I have known her for over twenty years past, and lay it lovingly on her coffin as my tribute to her memory. But mine is not the business of eulogy. This would be to divert your minds from the lesson which God designs to teach us, and to go counter to her own express wishes and feelings. “Don’t say much about me when I am gone,” said she on one occasion. “I am but a poor miserable sinner saved by the blood of Christ.” It was a sacred request which it becomes us to observe.

What she desired most of all was that her death might be sanctified to the spiritual welfare of her family and her church. This was with her the paramount consideration. She had seen the world in its fairest forms, and was endowed with a taste which could appreciate the best it had to offer. She could enjoy life as few could, and had most precious ties to bind her here to earth. Prospects, pleasant and fair, were also opening before her, inviting her to stay and promising her an increase of comfort. But that long

discipline of weakness and pain, lying as her confined spirit did beneath the overarching heavens from whence Christ shone down upon her, taught her as nothing else could, how uncertion, vain, delusory were all things here below, and how passing estimate was that blessed word of God taken fast in her embrace, which liveth and abideth forever. And this conviction she earnestly desired to have impressed through her experience on the minds of surviving friends. "Tell the church," she said, "they must live near to Christ. I feel their kindness much, and I want to live that I may do more for them; what I have done seems so little." Again, "Give my kind remembrances to the maternal meeting. I would have them give their meetings a more deeply spiritual character if possible." Again, "My children I would not have to be merely Christians. They must learn to live near to God, and spend their lives in doing good in His service." Such were the expressions of her interest in the spiritual welfare of others ever and anon dropping from her pallid lips. And oh, would that we could all take them home and feel their momentous truth as she felt them in view of the impending disclosures of the unseen world. At death, to every Christian the heavens pass away like a great scroll, the elements melt with a fervent heat, and nothing appears remaining but God, and Christ, and eternity. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, how pertinent the question of the apostle, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" It is a question which derives new enforcement this day through the earnest messages I

at last—a voluntary surrender of the spirit into the hands of a heavenly Father. And to this she was brought by the chastening of disease, no less than by the revelations of her Saviour to her faith; the two co-operated. At times, worn out by long endurance she would say, “I am so weary, so tired;” and would wonder that the Saviour did not come for her release. She was almost impatient to be gone. Then when told that Jesus would come just as soon as all was ready, she replied, on one occasion, “Yes, I don’t mean to be impatient; do you think I am?” At another time she asked, “Can’t you pray to Jesus that He would come and take me over the river?”

Thus there was all the “trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,” which a sensitive spirit would experience—as she lay suffering, with dear friends about her, anxious and intent on her recovery, and a heavenly home awaiting her above. And there were moments of rapture too, when it would seem as if she were holding colloquy with Christ, and repeating both parts—uttering her own earnest requests, and then His assurances of protection and safety; and ever and anon breaking out into praise.

Shall we say this was delirium? or was it not rather the actual communing of her spirit with the Saviour, who reveals Himself at such moments to His chosen as He does not unto us. Who can tell? To me they are awe-inspiring proofs of the soul’s mysterious relations to the unseen world, which seems to become more palpable the nearer we get to it.

The main lesson, however, which her experience teaches us, is the all-sufficiency of Jesus, and the insufficiency of all else. The excellence of deeds well

done, the warm devotion of friends lavishly bestowed, the kindest commendations fairly earned, had no comfort, no sustaining power, compared with what came from a Saviour crucified. The motto that hung in ornamental inscription before her eyes, ever to look at, was the constant and hearty expression of her lips,

“Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

It was here she held fast and was upheld. In moments of weakness, of fear, of solemn awe as she confronted the eternal future, this was what she repeated, again and again, adding with characteristic decision, “That is it—that is all.” Yes, it is all; so have the saintliest ever found it.

And, my friends, it was with this cross in hand that with fear and great joy she stepped down the bank and into the waters of the river, saying audibly to herself and friends, “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee.” It was her clear and impressive testimony to the truth of God’s salvation, to our great need, and the fulness of grace there is in Jesus to supply it. “Simply to thy cross I cling”—here is what we must all come to at last. And how peculiarly precious will these words henceforth sound to the friends who saw her look to them, or heard her utter them so often. A richer legacy of experience she could hardly have left to her family or to this church. As often as you sing these words think of her—of the sweet comfort she gained from them, and of the assurance she gives that the same comfort is for you.

“And what delights can equal those
 That stir the spirit's inner deeps
 When one that loves, but knows not, reaps
 A truth from one that loves and knows?”

The last scenes cannot better be given than in the language of the record from which I have been privileged to glean the expressions I have already quoted.

“Through the night (preceding the day of her death) she kept saying in broken words, “Lord lettest now thy servant depart in peace.” “Cover my defenceless head, with the shadow of Thy wing.” And other sentences of the like sort. After her pulse had ceased to be discoverable at the wrist, she still spoke with strong, audible voice, and freely expressed her love for Jesus, and her desire to depart. In broken accents she called for “a robe—a white robe—a white—a white—a white robe—wings”—meaning as was discovered from inquiry a white robe to wear in God’s presence, and wings to fly away and be at rest. Meanwhile death was coming rapidly on.

Most of the forenoon, instead of the dull, languid eye which could scarcely be opened, hers took an unnatural but most beautiful brilliancy; and at almost every word she spoke, a sweet smile, never to be forgotten, played over her face as if heaven’s own brightness already lighted the one, and heaven’s own beauty and sweetness invested the other. After her eyes were set in death, her husband attempted to elicit some response by words of endearment and perceiving no sign said “she cannot answer now.” Immediately her faint voice whispered, “But I hear

you," and in two or three minutes her breath stopped and she was asleep in Jesus.

So died ANNA PRENTISS STEARNS, on the 2d day of the year, in the 51st of her age, and the 26th of her marriage. Farewell, Sister.

Thou art gone to the grave, but we will not deplore thee,
 Since God was thy ransom, thy guardian, thy guide;
 He gave thee, he took thee, and he will restore thee,
 And death has no sting, since the Saviour has died.

And now, my bereaved and stricken brethren, closely allied as you have been through her that is gone, during so many years of varied and delightful intercourse, it hardly need be said that the link which thus long beautifully bound you is not broken. By no means. The earthly enamel only has crumbled under the pressure of God's unseen hand, who has laid hold upon it that he might draw you and yours in more sacred fellowship closer to Himself. By means of it He is leading you into the inmost sanctuary of sorrow that He may disclose to you those secrets of His love which are made known only to such as bow and worship there. It is our Saviour that has said, "Blessed are they that mourn." The truth of this gracious promise you have already tested. May you, through your recent trial, be led to experience it still more abundantly, that as ministers of the new covenant richly taught, you may be able to "comfort others with the comfort wherewith ye yourselves have been comforted of God."

NJ R B St358
Poor, Daniel Warren,
In memoriam : Mrs. J.F.
Stearns.
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